

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

TALES OF THE LINKS OF LOVE.

BY ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE.

GOING TO AMERICA.

IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER V.

IN SHIPS ON THE OCEAN.

On the sea wall, at the docks of Liverpool, a solitary man stands in the night, in thick darkness. By a chance he was there once before; and now patiently awaits renewal of a vision, seldom looked for by people abiding in the town, and only discernible by the vivid of fancy; a vision mysterious, sublime, beautiful.

No moon, no stars, no glimmer of light. No wind stirring the waters, or rigging of the ships. There is but one sound, the invisible inflowing tide lap, lap, lapping on the stones. "And the spirit moved upon the face of the waters." He listens, he hears, and counts pulses of eternity, in that long, long night preceding the dawn of time.

What is that? Something with glaring red, and white, and green eyes in its head, in its tail, on its wings. It emerges from the invisible shore, plunging on the face of the waters, gliding around a half circle in the blackness, stops. Its fiery orbs glare upon the lone witness, this solitary soul.

What is that? Another something, hissing and spitting fire in the face of night, emerges from the invisible shore, making a circuit to its place beside the other. Red eye one side of the head, green eye other side of the head. Glaring eyes in the tail. Green and white eyes winking at, or blaring on the lone man, this solitary soul.

What is that? A third something, hissing and spitting fire in the air from tip of its black tongue. It emerges from the invisible shore. Red and green and white its eyes, in head, and in tail. It makes a wider circuit behind the other two, ranging with them. And after these seven more; ten in all. They move. Intruding mortal! they cover him with their weird eyes and advance. On the lone man, this solitary soul, they seem to come.

Sound of a voice, the morning star, the dawn, daylight, the rising sun. Sound of a voice: "Let there be light, and there was light." A city appears, a great river, a country bathed in morning glory, the ocean with ships in full sail.

Samson Steelyard, this lone man, is soaring on wing of his own rapture. He has been in sight of chaos before time came to the birth. He has stood by the Infinite on the morning of creation. "My mind to me a kingdom is," that is his song this morning.

Voices of men in chorus with clanking of chains; clink, clink, clinking of windlass and capstans. Voices of sailors on decks of many ships, raising the anchors, preparing for sea. Heave her up merrily! Heave her up cheerily! Heave away, my hearties! Heave, yo-ho! And tug steamers, which in the darkness emerged from shore with red, and white, and green glaring lights, tow out sailing ships to open ocean, and bring the homeward-bound in.

Of ships just away, are the "Hope" and "Star," carrying emigrants to ports in the United States. Of ships nearly ready, are the "Fidels" and "Fingal," carrying emigrants, mostly poor hand-loom weavers, to ports in British America. The last named takes, of the Blanketeers: Lud, Irk, Steelyard, Thomas of Owdham, Humphry Horn, Bees of the Barn, Bowton Trotter, Ized and Tabitha Bold, with the babe, the Zoroaster, as the child is proudly termed by the father. Similarly as its mother, daughter of poesy, is styled the Redwald. These two and child are cabin passengers. They emigrate because they must, or take the hazard of a trial for sedition. Two government agents, a doctor, twenty soldiers and some army officers are to be in this ship, in all four hundred passengers. They are not so greatly crowded as one might expect. The "Fingal" is a vessel of grand proportions, well found, well manned, and under a commander of skill.

Stowage for luggage is difficult, the quantity large and various: looms, headles, treadles, shuttles, bobbins, wheels, reels, stocking knitting machines, and frames for muslin-tam-bouring. Not likely to be wanted in the forest wilderness, whither they go, but not to be left behind willingly; not to be detained by order of any authority. "Sir Hullah Baloo has come to the wharf and at faintest restraint on the weavers, in the quantity of useless luggage, exclaims: "political persecution."

Mr. Verderer, chief agent of the Crown, going in the "Fingal," has been privately instructed by Lord Royalfort to treat the unfortunate weavers gently, as far as imperative circumstance permits. Verderer is an easy gentleman, meaning to be kind, but leaving his clerk, Kirby Rivers, to manage.

It is remarked at Liverpool that this ship carries stores unusually large.

"Perhaps the Blanketeers go on a much longer trip than to Canada," says a loiterer, in hearing of Irk and Lud; "more likely going to Botany Bay."

Among the weavers the remark comes up that all their leading men and women have been selected for this ship.

Steelyard suggests that the Government agent being a passenger, the prominent Blanketeers are allotted to this vessel for conference and arrangement about the land they are to occupy. Irk has misgivings, and often whispers with Lud.

When they are clear of port ten days, weather fine and sea-sickness abating, Lud, Steelyard, and Irk go as a deputation to the cabin to see the Government officer. They had asked an interview in the morning, and were told to come in the evening. It is now dusk. Mr. Verderer is with the captain and military officers at wine. Kirby Rivers receives the deputation, gruffly demanding:

"What do you want?"

"We come," says Lud, "to see Mr. Verderer by appointment."

"You cannot see Mr. Verderer; what do you want? I am here to answer for him, and for myself also."

"In that case we address you, Mr. Rivers. We have come thus far from home, trusting the promise of Crown and Government that we go to Canada to take possession of a tract of country, sufficient to give to each family or two male adults, a lot of two hundred acres, exclusive of roads, village lots, and church reserves. This land is to be conveyed to us, a free grant from the Crown. We are to have implements, seed, and provisions for two years; cross-cut saw and grinding stone between two. Such was the promise. We are told this ship carries none of the implements, and feel desirous of having particulars settled. That is, when Mr. Verderer is at leisure."

"What particulars do you want settled?"

"We should see, on a map of the country, the locality of the intended settlement."

"What if the country has no map?"

"The country no map! We have seen the map; have one with us in fact. We require to be informed of the locality, and to see the land-warrants his Honour was to bring from London."

"With what conscience do you radical Blanketeers expect gifts of land from the Crown, when only last year you bound yourselves by oath that no farm in England was, in future, to exceed fifty acres. Were you not in arms to abolish private property in land, and to divide farms down to fifty acres?"

"Last year is not this year," replies Lud. "We satisfy our own consciences in this matter. Two hundred acres of land a family, or one hundred acres a single man, were promised by a power higher than you, Mr. Rivers. Show the warrants authorizing our occupation of that land. Show the locality of the land on the map."

"Your land belongs to no map. That is, if ever you have land other than six feet by two. The higher authority than myself of which you speak, has committed the choice of location to Mr. Verderer and to me. We may or may not select a location on arriving in the country. The place of your destination has no map. That is my answer. Return to your berths."

The deputation withdraw to relate in the steerage what has been said in the cabin. On the deck a man whispers Steelyard to stop. In the dark his features are not seen; nor is his voice or person known to the listener. He says:—

"Your name, I think, is Steelyard. I am Jack Holt, a sailor, and have something to tell. I saw you standing on the sea wall at Liverpool in the dead of night, alone; why did you remain there, hours and hours in the murky dark?"

"That was my own affair. How do you know? Where was you?"

"Watching Samson Steelyard. Are you now ready to hear what I have to tell?"

"If it be a proper thing for me to know, Jack, tell it."

"Promise not to mention it again, leastways, not without my permission; or, if you do whisper it to any one, conceal my name."

"I promise that."

"Swear upon your soul not to reveal this secret."

"I will not swear. Why should I swear to a thing I know nothing of? Keep the secret to yourself if it must be sworn to."

"You shall know it, and must keep it until honourably released from the obligation. Else something terrible may occur."

"Say no more, Jack Holt. Confide no secret to me. Not to me."

"I must. You are now bound to listen. I have gone too far to stop."

"Well, sailor, say on. What is it?"

"It is this: You weavers are not going to Canada. You are not going anywhere to receive gifts of Crown lands. This ship takes you to a desert island, a wilderness, to be treated as slaves or convicts, until your reimbursement Government for the costs of fighting at the battle of Stone Grove, last year."

"We'll turn back the ship!"

"Will you? What of the soldiers? Attempt it, or look alarmed, or seem suspicious, and the whole gang of you are to be battened down under hatches. If need be, chained by the feet, two and two together. And, if mutinous, shot."

"Jack Holt, either this is falsehood, or it is—"

"You would say base, brutal treachery. Which is it?"

"Falsehood!"

"Listen, Mr. Steelyard. If Lord Royalfort was brutal enough to send the armed yeomanry on the weavers at Stone Grove, riding them down at the gallop, wounding and slaying defenceless working men, think you he is not capable of devising and enjoying vengeance for the loss of his grand-child and heir, whom some of you hold concealed somewhere, so it is lately rumoured. Lord Royalfort's wrath will pursue you as long as a Stone Grove weaver, or the child of one lives. Unless, indeed, his infant heir be safely restored."

"Jack, this is not the speech of a sailor. Who are you?"

"You have my name. I tell this for your safety as a warning, and run deadly risk in the matter. Who am I, indeed? That is the usual thanks for honest service."

"I do not believe your story, Jack Holt, not any part of it. How is any of our weavers to be in possession of the Royalfort boy? The infant was torn limb from limb by eagles in Scotland, as was well known at the time. Lord Royalfort is a generous and good man. Impetuous in temper, perhaps, but incapable of treachery."

"Incapable? Did he not order Bally-brickery, in Ireland, to be levelled? Did he not command the Yeomanry to charge, sword in hand, on the poor weavers?"

"The poor weavers, as you term them, went out, a few armed, most not, but all in the attitude of hostility. His position demanded of him to prevent the Blanketeers from advancing on London. It has been told us that he suffers anguish at the reflection that bloodshed occurred. I for one look on that lord of Lillymere Hall as a good and generous man, aristocrat though he be. It is through his intervention with the Crown that we are to be settled in Canada on public lands, instead of being prosecuted on charges of treason, and possibly hanged."

"What, think you, are the soldiers here for? Why are the weaver chiefs gathered into this particular ship?"

"Why are the weaver chiefs here? They are here to consult with the agent during the passage about the locality of our land, and manner of its allotment."

"The locality of your land! Did not the agent, just now, contemptuously deny there is land, or to be land, other than six feet by two to each of you?"

"Kirby Rivers did. To my grief he did."

"To your alarm, say. He threatened, asserting that the country you go to has no map. I tell you it is a desert island."

"How came you to hear what was said in the cabin?"

"I know what is going on, Steelyard, and give timely warning."

"Warning against what? And why? What should we do?"

"Does nothing feasible occur to your mind?"

"Nothing; unless compelling the captain to turn back the ship."

"The soldiers, Mr. Steelyard. They are armed."

"Cannot the arms be taken from them in the night?"

"They are always alert. You are already suspected."

"Sailor, take back your horrid story. I accept no such secrets, they cannot be retained by me. I must consult with Abram Lud at once."

"Are you married, Steelyard?"

"No. Why inquire?"

"Because you might have whispered this matter to a wife; told her that escape from deadly peril depends, in some manner, on discovering if the lost heir of Lillymere be one of the children in this ship. Having no wife of your own perhaps this may be quietly confided to some other woman whose husband is, like you, in jeopardy." Which said, Jack Holt disappears.

Steelyard leans over the ship's side, meditating to this effect: "Who is that man? What are his motives? Signs of alarm, or suspicion of our knowing the plot against us, may lead to imprisonment under hatches. To be chained, perhaps shot. So, that is why soldiers are here. The pretence was their going to Colonial regiments. The story may be confided to an alarmed woman who in due course will spread it, and so, all of us alarmed may be imprisoned and the catastrophe completed. That is one view of the matter, and the worst. I cannot accept this as possible. Yet the insolence of Kirby Rivers seems to confirm it."

Thus disturbed in thought, Steelyard goes below. A cry of voices:

"Here he comes. Let him answer for himself. Hear what he has to say; then proceed with the trial. Instant execution—gagged and overboard, if guilty."

To be continued.

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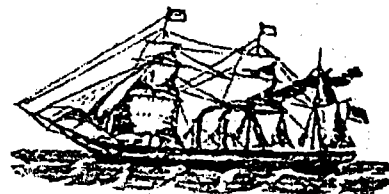
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